

**PROPOSED RULE REGARDING THE MEDICARE PROGRAM AND  
REVISIONS TO PAYMENT POLICIES -- HON. LUIS FORTUÑO  
(Extensions of Remarks - December 08, 2006)**

[Page: E2169]

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**HON. LUIS FORTUÑO**  
OF PUERTO RICO  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
Thursday, December 7, 2006

- Mr. FORTUÑO. Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my concern over the proposed rule put forth earlier this year by the Department of Health and Human Services regarding the Medicare Program and revisions to payment policies under the physician fee schedule for calendar year 2007. This rule, as written, would have a negative impact on Puerto Rican doctors and their patients. While I fully support the overall objective of the changes--to ensure that HHS payment systems are updated to reflect changes in medical practice and the relative value of services--I am confident that can be achieved without inflicting another harmful financial burden on Puerto Rico. I would support legislative activity that would prevent further cuts from taking place.
- First, it must be understood that the cost of living in Puerto Rico is at least the same, if not higher than in the U.S. mainland. As a matter of fact, the costs of transportation, water, electric power and housing are all notably higher on the Island. These cost differentials were not adequately considered in the proposed rule.
- Under the proposed rule, Puerto Rico would be forced to assume two large losses. The first is on the elimination of the payment floor with slightly over a 2 percent cut, plus the cuts in each of the specialties. Radiology would suffer the most, with an average cut of 16 percent. This is an issue that affects doctors, patients and ultimately the quality of care that can be provided to those most in need. I strongly recommend that these proposed reductions be suspended for calendar year 2007, and that the impact of any further floor reductions be considered thoroughly before implementation.
- As you know, Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens and pay the same Medicare payroll taxes and deductibles as their fellow citizens in the 50 States. Thus, we must ensure that Medicare recipients in Puerto Rico have the same access to quality health care as those in the 50 States, and that health care providers on the Island receive satisfactory reimbursements for their services.